

LEAN TRANSFORMATION HELPS GROWING COMPANY KEEP UP  
WITH DEMAND

**ABOUT DAKOTA BODIES.** Dakota Bodies develops and builds truck bodies for the service and industrial markets. Based in Watertown, South Dakota, the company has around 250 employees serving customers throughout the United States and Canada.

**THE CHALLENGE.** Dakota Bodies experienced steady growth since its inception, but faced challenges in meeting market demand. The company made several improvements, adding 45,000 square feet to the facility to provide additional space for cutting and bending equipment, and hiring a Continuous Improvement Engineer to begin the process of implementing Lean Manufacturing. "We quickly learned that formal training of our supervisory team needed to occur for us to be successful," said Joel Grode, Director of Production. "This is when I asked a former colleague from Larson Manufacturing who they used—he told me it was South Dakota Manufacturing and Technology Solutions (MTS)."

**MEP CENTER'S ROLE.** After reaching out to MTS, part of the MEP National Network™, Dakota Bodies officially embarked on its Lean journey. MTS conducted an assessment of the company's operations and worked with company leaders to define their goals for the engagement. They decided the first step would be a Lean 101 training for a group of 40 Dakota Bodies employees, including supervisors, managers, and key operators. After the eight-hour course, Dakota Bodies participated in four separate on-site projects with MTS. The company developed a kanban system for numerous part numbers and implemented tool carts to clear space in the production area. The team also improved workplace organization using the 5S methodology of Sort, Set in Order, Shine, Standardize, and Sustain.

Dakota Bodies now performs weekly audits on each 5S event area, raising revenues and improving overall productivity by a significant margin. The company standardized work practices and reduced training time, gaining consistency and improving quality. "The next steps will be training more of our employees in Lean, implementing a Kaizen team, and conducting a door-to-door VSM (Value Stream Mapping) exercise throughout our company," said Grode.

"As we continue through our Lean journey, we are continuously looking for ways to improve our organization to provide a better product to our customers. We're extremely excited about what the possibilities hold for us. Many thanks to the MTS team for leading us at the start of this journey."

-Joel Grode, Director of Operations

## RESULTS



Developed a kanban system for over **180** part numbers



Improved revenues by **20%**



Saved over **2,200** square feet of room by developing tool carts



**5%** increase in overall productivity

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